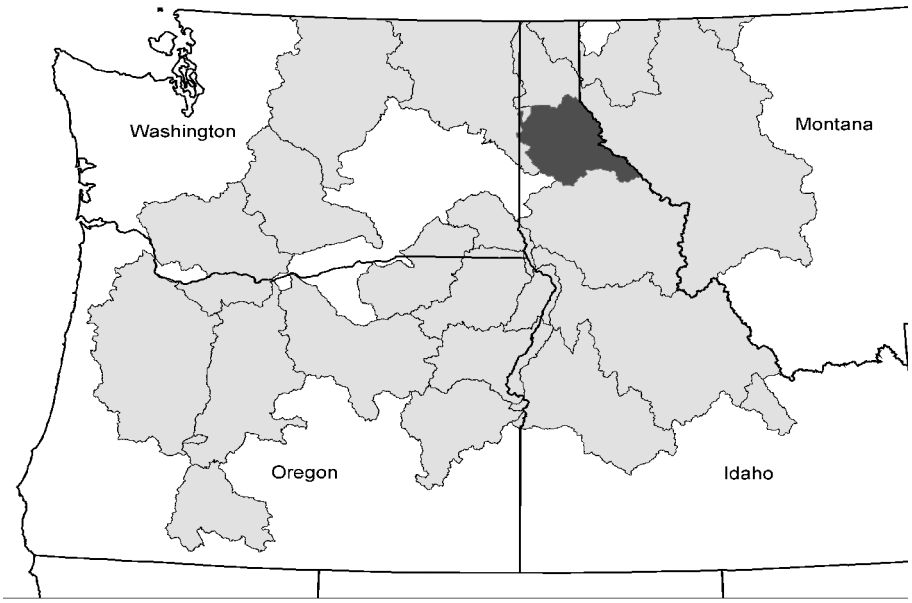
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Couer d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 15)



What areas are included in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit?

This recovery unit encompasses the Spokane River and its tributaries upstream of Post Falls Dam as well as Coeur d'Alene Lake and its tributaries. In total, there are approximately 4,290 miles of streams comprising 502 named streams in the Coeur d'Alene Lake basin. For recovery purposes, the Coeur d'Alene Recovery Unit Team identified the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin as the only core area within unit. The core area includes the entire Coeur d'Alene Lake and the St. Joe and Coeur d'Alene river sub-basins and their tributaries. Within that core area are three known local populations of bull trout - Medicine Creek, Wisdom Creek and the St. Joe River between Heller Creek and St. Joe Lake.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

The Coeur d'Alene Lake critical habitat unit consists of 30 stream reaches or tributaries comprising 421 miles and 31,450 aces of lake surface area (Coeur d'Alene Lake) in Kootenai, Shoshone, Benewah and Bonner counties in Northern Idaho (see Maps). This equals approximately 6 percent of all streams and less than 10 percent of total stream length in the basin. This totals approximately 9 percent of the waterways in the recovery unit. Landownership along stream proposed as critical habitat for bull trout include approximately 63 percent Federal, 30 percent private, and 6 percent State.

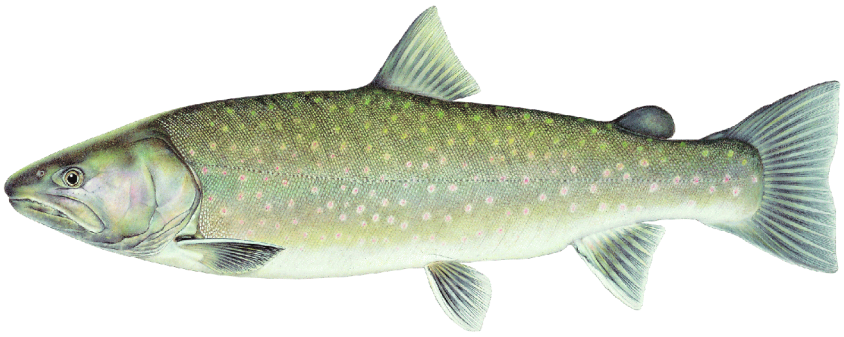
Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and the

critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.



Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

The primary effect of a critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed? Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this area were listed in 1998 as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Estimates based on 10 years of redd surveys (eggs laid in streams) show the average annual spawning population is roughly 180 adult bull trout. Local populations within the core area are primarily migratory and may use the Coeur d'Alene Lake and St. Joe and Coeur d'Alene rivers during some portion of

their life stage. At the time of listing the status of bull trout in this area was considered depressed and population trends declining. Sixty years ago bull trout were documented in more than 30 streams and river reaches throughout the Coeur d'Alene Basin. Now, spawning and rearing appears to be concentrated in relatively few tributaries in the St. Joe River sub-basin.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit?

Threats include forest management practices that have altered aquatic and riparian habitats, resulting in the loss of riparian vegetation and woody debris in streams and sedimentation that has reduced pool habitat and embedded spawning habitat. Mining activities have contributed to the general degradation of riparian habitat and water quality in Coeur d'Alene Lake and the Coeur d'Alene basin. Road building in the basin and some agricultural practices also negatively affect bull trout in this area. In-stream remnants of historic dams inhibit upstream migration for bull trout in this area, especially during lower stream flows

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be delisted. To recover bull trout in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit, the following objectives have been identified:

- Maintain current distribution of bull trout and restore distribution in previously occupied or depressed areas within the recovery unit
- Maintain stable or increasing trends in bull trout abundance
- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life stages
- Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

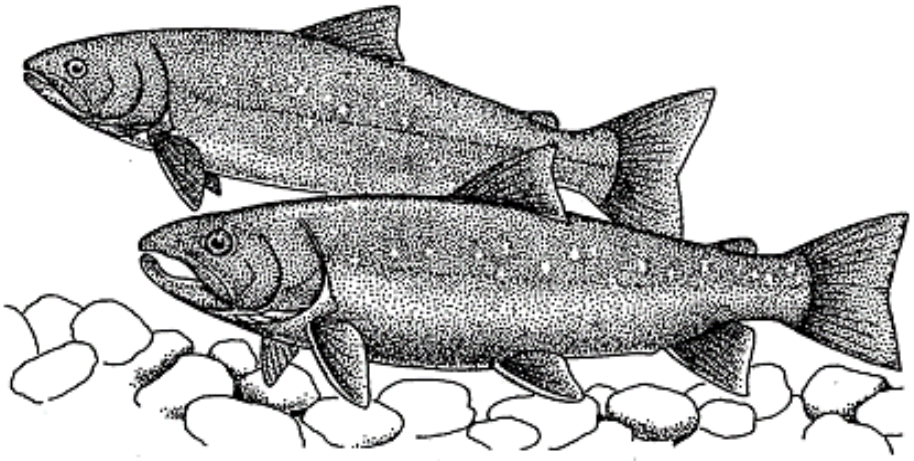
Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

Distribution criteria will be met when the total number of stable local populations has increased to 11 and when these populations occur broadly throughout the core area

Abundance criteria will be met when the core area hosts at least 11 stable local populations (eight in the St. Joe River and three in the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River), contributing to an average of 1,100 adult bull trout spawners per year.

Trend criteria will be met when the overall bull trout population in the recovery unit is stable or increases based on at least 10 years of monitoring data.

Connectivity criteria will be met when migratory forms of bull trout are present in all local populations and when intact migratory corridors among all local populations in the core area provide opportunity for genetic exchange and diversity.



What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit?

Actions to recover bull trout in this unit are arranged in a tiered manner and generally consist of enhancing habitat, improving water quality, restoring stream connectivity and opportunities for migration, and enhancing opportunities for genetic exchange among local bull trout populations. For this recovery unit other actions

include: Establishing and implementing fisheries management goals and objectives that are compatible with bull trout recovery; developing and implementing State and Tribal native fish management plans that integrate adaptive research; preventing incidental mortality due to angling misidentification by engaging in public education opportunities; evaluating effects of non-native fish on bull trout in this area; and evaluating the effects on bull trout of existing and proposed sport fishing regulations.

How long will recovery take?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years) before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting. In considering the time it would take to recover the species in this unit, two scenarios are possible in the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River: Allowing natural recolonization, which could take an additional 20-25 years, or beginning a controlled bull trout propagation program, which could prolong recovery by only five to ten years.

How much will recovery cost?
Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Coeur d'Alene Lake Basin Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about $3.9 million spread over 25 years. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?
The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?
The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

In addition, a series of public meetings and public hearings will be held in January. Times and locations will be posted on our Bull Trout website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout and publicized in local newspapers.

This is only a brief summary.
Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.